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Summary record of the 8th meeting
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Tuesday, 21 October 1997, at 10 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. Busacca ..... (Italy)
later: Mr. Choe Myong Nam (Vice-Chairman) ..... (Democratic People's Republic of Korea)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Agenda item 105: Advancement of women (*continued*) (A/52/3, A/52/38/Rev.1, A/52/116-S/1997/317, A/52/300, A/52/326, A/52/337, A/52/352, A/52/355, A/52/356, A/52/408, A/52/447-S/1997/775 and A/52/460)

Agenda item 106: Implementation of the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women (*continued*) (A/52/28, A/52/113, A/52/113-E/1997/18, A/52/447-S/1997/775 and A/52/460)

1. **Ms. Suarez** (Observer for the Holy See) said that as a result of the Fourth World Conference on Women, a general effort had been made to improve living conditions for women. However, more attention should be paid to the natural rights conferred on women by motherhood and their role in the family. Women wished those rights to be respected and considered as equally important as the offices that they held in public life. The freedom to procreate was one such right, which should not be interfered with by sterilization or compulsory abortion, coercive family planning policies or other forms of pressure, which were merely a violation of the rights of women and parents and an attack on the family, the basic unit of society.

2. Society must support women in their role as mothers. In order to help them provide education for their children, in particular religious and moral training, society must support and protect the family and help parents to exercise their rights and assume their responsibilities.

3. Societal support should consist of offering women legitimate options which took into account their manifold duties and interests. The value of mothers' work in the home must be recognized, and any discrimination against mothers must be eliminated, particularly with respect to social security benefits. Furthermore, women who chose to work outside the home had the right to pursue their careers without facing discrimination because they were mothers. The measures required, principally the social protection of mothers and the introduction of flexible working hours and part-time employment, should be adopted in order to allow more women to pursue a career. It was also necessary that men should fully assume their family responsibilities, particularly with regard to the education of children. Improvement in conditions for women required renewed political will.

4. **Mr. Nguyen Thanh Chau** (Viet Nam) said that despite firm commitments made to the advancement of women, much remained to be done in order to implement the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. The empowerment of women required serious efforts to be made to bring about changes in economic, social, political and other fields. Such changes could only be sustainable if the goal was the empowerment of women.

5. In the economic field, gender equality could not be attained in the context of the growing feminization of poverty, a phenomenon which had been increasing in developing countries, and which was generally due to the absence of autonomy and economic opportunities and lack of access to economic resources such as credit and land ownership.

6. Education was one of the main means of improving the overall situation of women. However, educational discrimination based on gender inequality remained one of the most serious problems. Measures therefore needed to be taken in order to improve women's access to education, which would change their way of life and that of the community, particularly in rural areas.

7. The political empowerment of women was essential to the sustainable improvement in their status and required that they should have increased control over their lives and an enhanced capacity to influence the direction of social development. Policies which favoured women should therefore be adopted, women's training should rapidly be improved and women should be encouraged to participate in social undertakings in order to acquire self-confidence, experience and knowledge.

8. Since the Fourth World Conference on Women, the Vietnamese Government had taken various measures which favoured women. The publication of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in Vietnamese had helped to promote social awareness of gender issues. A national plan of action had also been formulated, among the most important objectives of which was to create employment opportunities and income-generation activities for women, provide women with equal access to education, improve health care and enhance women's participation in decision-making processes.

9. **Mr. Najem** (Lebanon) said that women's issues were particularly important, since everyone today was convinced of the need to respect human rights, of which women's fundamental rights were an integral part.

10. In 1996, the Lebanese Government had set up a national committee on the status of women which, in cooperation with other institutions concerned with women and family-related issues, had formulated a national strategy intended to ensure the complete equality of women through

the adoption of appropriate legislation, guarantee respect for the fundamental rights of women enshrined in the national constitution and international instruments, strengthen women's skills to give them equal opportunities to fulfil their potential, increase women's representation in government agencies and their participation in decision-making at all levels, and ensure that the principle of gender equality was generally applied.

11. In order to achieve those objectives, international instruments must be respected, all laws guaranteeing women's rights must be applied, existing laws harmonized and new laws adopted in order to combat discrimination, and women's resistance to the Israeli occupation must be supported until the national territory had been liberated. Since the Beijing Conference had recognized foreign occupation as a violation of women's rights, all countries which cared about peace and the rights of women should show their solidarity with Lebanese women, since the progress of a country could be measured by the extent to which women there exercised their rights.

12. **Mr. Enkhsaikan** (Mongolia), referring to the report of the Secretary-General on the improvement of the situation of women in rural areas (A/52/326), said that women made up 50.3 per cent of the population in his country, and that 45 per cent of them lived in rural areas, leading a nomadic or semi-nomadic way of life. The transition to a market economy that the country had embarked upon in 1990 had brought both opportunities and challenges for rural women; while the privatization of livestock had turned female herders into owners, thus improving their economic welfare, the dismantling of the State-subsidized social safety net and the subsequent failure, particularly in rural areas, to replace it immediately with market-driven alternatives had adversely affected the living standards of the rural population, especially women.

13. The Living Standards Measurement Survey conducted by the World Bank in 1995 had shown that 36 per cent of Mongolians lived below the poverty line and that poverty, which was particularly acute in rural areas, had the harshest impact on women, owing to a rapid increase in female-headed households. Furthermore, unemployment, which stood at around 7 per cent, had increased among the rural population.

14. His Government attached particular importance to improving the situation of women in rural areas. In June 1996, pursuant to the recommendations of the Fourth World Conference on Women, it had adopted the National Programme of Action for the Advancement of Women, which, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 50/165, included within its 10 critical areas of concern the need to integrate the social and economic concerns of rural women into national rural development policies and programmes.

15. Moreover, the 6-year multisectoral National Poverty Alleviation Programme, launched by his Government in 1994, proposed ways of reducing the feminization of poverty, focused on alleviating rural poverty and promoted income and employment opportunities among small herders. Similarly, as a follow-up to the Micro-Credit Summit held at Washington, D.C., in February 1997, his Government had organized a national forum on small credit, at which ways of giving the rural poor greater access to productive resources had been discussed.

16. In accordance with the Beijing Platform for Action, the Mongolian National Council for the Advancement of Women, set up in late 1996, sought to involve women actively in the formulation and implementation of national policies for the advancement of women and in coordinating the activities of various governmental and non-governmental organizations.

17. While the Constitution provided for equal rights for women and men with respect to employment, and the privatization process had been under way since 1990, the laws and regulations in force did not ensure that women, including rural women, had equal access to productive resources. For that reason, his Government was considering the introduction of a national programme to address that issue. Furthermore, his Government had, in cooperation with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), implemented a successful distance learning project for rural women which it was planning to expand.

18. Together with other delegations and sponsors, his delegation intended to submit a draft resolution on the improvement of the situation of women in rural areas.

19. **Ms. Fritsche** (Liechtenstein) said that the Beijing Platform for Action was an empowerment tool for women which reaffirmed that their rights were an inalienable and integral part of human rights. Of the 12 critical areas of concern identified in the Platform, her Government had decided to give priority to education and training for women, violence against women, women in power and decision-making, institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women and women's human rights. It had already taken specific steps to eliminate discrimination with regard to citizenship and social security, establish machinery to deal with equality issues, promote the work of non-governmental organizations and the advancement of women in public

administration, accede to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and protect the employment status and social security benefits of pregnant women and nursing mothers. It had also organized an exhibition on educational opportunities for girls and campaigns against sexual harassment and domestic violence and had taken steps to make family and professional life more compatible and to increase women's participation in politics. An interim report on the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action would be submitted to the Division for the Advancement of Women by the end of the month, and a more detailed document would be adopted by her Government early in the following year.

20. During the Fourth World Conference on Women, the international community had stressed the importance of increasing the participation of women in the decision-making process; nevertheless, it was clear that women, who constituted half of the world's population, were underrepresented in both the public and private sectors. The situation appeared to be improving, however, and it was important for the United Nations to set an example by increasing the number of women in the Secretariat, particularly at the decision-making level. Much remained to be done if women were to occupy 25 per cent of senior posts and gender equality was to be achieved by the year 2000. The new performance appraisal system, in which gender was identified as a mandatory performance dimension for supervisory and managerial staff, should play a role in that regard.

21. Women, who maintained the social fabric, had an essential contribution to make to the advancement, maintenance and restoration of peace. She therefore welcomed the increasingly important role of women in preventive diplomacy and post-conflict peace-building and peacekeeping. Since women had special abilities when it came to negotiating, consensus-building, listening and adapting, their participation in United Nations-sponsored negotiations and field missions was a key element in the settlement of disputes.

22. Violence against women was a plague that knew no boundaries; it was one of the most serious obstacles to women's equality and human development and the well-being of children and families, and steps must be taken to address it. Her Government had recently launched information and awareness-raising campaigns against domestic violence and sexual harassment in the workplace; the success of those campaigns would depend on changing attitudes among men and in society in general.

23. **Ms. Al-Awadhi** (Kuwait) said that the situation of Kuwaiti women had evolved rapidly and that women were privileged in many respects. Women had access to education at all levels and made up 28 per cent of the active population in 1996. They played a vital role in economic and social development and took part in decision-making. They were active in all areas of paid as well as volunteer work.

24. Equality between men and women and the right of all to work were enshrined in the Constitution. The development plans drawn up in the 1970s also provided for the participation of women.

25. Like their children, who had witnessed Iraqi brutality, Kuwaiti women suffered from behavioural problems and had to cope with psychological and social problems. The Iraqi occupation of Kuwait had resulted not only in material damage. Rape, torture and other acts of cruelty had been common and Iraq's refusal to give full information on the situation of Kuwaitis reported as missing or imprisoned in Iraq, or to release the latter, only made the situation worse and increased the feeling of frustration, not only of the Kuwaiti women whose spouses had been taken from them, but also of the countries in the coalition and the International Committee of the Red Cross.

26. **Ms. Tarr-Wheelan** (United States of America) said that she found it encouraging that the Economic and Social Council was trying to mainstream the gender perspective into all policies and programmes of United Nations bodies and to take it into account in the implementation of the decisions of recent summits and conferences. She encouraged the General Assembly to request all its committees and bodies to do likewise and said she was pleased to see that the Inter-Agency Committee on Women and Gender Equality was developing tools to ensure the accountability, monitoring and evaluation of programmes to allow gender issues to be taken into account.

27. For its part, the United States of America had not been idle. President Clinton had established an inter-agency council on women to ensure the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. After identifying the new initiatives of each agency and measuring progress, the council had established working groups to introduce reforms at the Federal Government level. As a follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women, a constantly evolving action plan had been drawn up, which included an initiative focusing on disabled women. An international forum had been organized on that theme and was being followed up by government agencies and non-governmental organizations.

28. Her delegation believed that the advancement of women in the United Nations system, particularly at decision-making levels, was an essential part of the efforts to ensure gender balance and to avoid impeding women's career development. She supported the Secretary-General's goal of achieving gender equality by the year 2000 and encouraged him to appoint more women, especially in the areas of peacekeeping and preventive diplomacy.

29. Her Government condemned trafficking in women and children and was seeking to combat that crime in various ways. It had promulgated very strict laws against trafficking in persons and sex tourism. However, source, transit and destination countries needed to collaborate and regional cooperation must also be established if organized, large-scale trafficking was to be combated. The United States and the European Union had, for example, jointly begun to develop an information campaign to combat trafficking of women in Eastern Europe and the newly independent States of the former Soviet Union, which was targeted not only at potential victims but also at government officials and consular officers.

30. She welcomed the appointment of the new High Commissioner for Human Rights and, on the eve of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the fifth anniversary of the World Conference on Human Rights, expressed the wish that the Commission on Human Rights would be inspired by the work of the Commission on the Status of Women to ensure that gender equality and the human rights of women would be integrated into the human rights activities of the United Nations. She also hoped that the Commission on the Status of Women would identify steps that could be taken by the United Nations, the international community, non-governmental organizations, governments and individuals to eradicate violence against women and girls.

31. Her delegation protested against the violations of human rights in Afghanistan and the restrictions imposed by the Taliban on women and girls in the areas of education and employment. No society could function without the contribution of women. The issue had been raised with Taliban officials and representatives of other Afghan groups. It was important that the international community should continue to focus on the status of women in Afghanistan.

32. ***Mr. Choe Myong Nam*** *(Democratic People's Republic of Korea), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.*

33. **Ms. Younos** (Afghanistan) said that her delegation wished to become a sponsor of certain draft resolutions to be presented to the Committee. Over 500 million women lived in Islamic communities. Islam recognized the equality between men and women in many areas, and the overall improvement in living conditions in the twentieth century had had a beneficial effect on the situation of women and girls in Islamic countries. However, at the moment, Afghanistan, a landlocked country which was one of the least advanced countries and which had been occupied by a great Power from 1979 to 1989, had for three years been under the military and political occupation of the Taliban, who wrongly invoked the precepts of Islam to undermine the rights of women by imposing numerous restrictions on them. The Taliban had deprived women and girls of their rights to education and to work by closing schools, prohibiting women from going out without a veil, at the risk of being beaten, as well as from taking part in the social, cultural, political and economic life of the country, which created a particularly difficult situation for women who had lost their husbands during the conflict and who still had to meet the needs of their families.

34. Her delegation reaffirmed that the regime imposed by the Taliban, who were in fact mercenaries trained by Pakistan, was incompatible with the nature of the Afghan people. Afghanistan could only recover with the active participation of all Afghans, particularly women, and with the cooperation of the whole international community and all international organizations.

35. **Ms. Sham Poo** (United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)) said that the Fund's gender policy since 1994 promoted gender equality, the empowerment of women and full participation by women in the political, social and economic development of their communities by incorporating gender issues into all programmes. That policy, which drew on the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, was at the heart of an ever-increasing number of UNICEF country programmes. The 1998-2001 programme of cooperation between Mali and UNICEF, for example, fitted within the National Plan of Action for Children, the Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women and the World Summit for Children.

36. Many country programmes had identified domestic violence against women and girls as the most pervasive human rights violation. In South Asia, for example, a UNICEF project was identifying male and female anti-violence activists and collating success stories of action by grass-roots organizations. In October 1997 a regional meeting had also been arranged at the UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia, in consultation with the United Nations Development Fund for Women, the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Population Fund and the World Health Organization, to exchange

information and to focus on the increased involvement of men as part of the solution to the problems caused by domestic violence.

37. The Fourth World Conference on Women had resulted in a political commitment by most countries to adopt new policies for women and girls and had enabled UNICEF to incorporate gender issues into some of the 40 new country programmes approved by the Executive Board in September 1996. The country programmes of Belize, Côte d'Ivoire, Malawi, Namibia and Nepal had set clear goals for reducing inequality, educating women and girls, lowering maternal mortality, preventing teenage pregnancy and HIV/AIDS and eradicating discriminatory practices such as female genital mutilation and early marriage. The training of UNICEF staff, the application of the Women's Equality and Empowerment Framework and the establishment of networks of experts to support country-programme preparation had been significant in mainstreaming gender issues in country programmes, as had the decentralization of capacity-building and the local adaptations or translations of the UNICEF gender-training package for non-governmental organizations, functionaries and women leaders in Haiti, Iran, Indonesia, Jamaica, Nicaragua, the Philippines, South Africa, the Sudan and Viet Nam. The Nigeria country programme was an example of the Fund's fruitful cooperation with countries in that field. In order to ensure that the policy would be successful in the long term, tools such as gender analysis, data disaggregated by sex and age, specific surveys and studies, indicators and an information base on mainstreaming the best practices needed to be developed.

38. **Ms. Olszowska** (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)) said that progress had been made in expanding the provision of primary schooling for children, but the progress in reducing adult illiteracy, especially among women, had been far less spectacular.

39. The main priorities of UNESCO regarding women and gender equality continued to be the nine principal objectives defined in its Agenda for Gender Equality, which was an integral part of its Medium-Term Plan 1996-2001. Other priority areas were equal access to education, literacy and education for girls and the recognition of women's contribution to peace, the media, the management of natural resources and environmental protection.

40. In the Beijing Platform for Action, UNESCO was specifically requested to contribute to the evaluation of progress achieved, using educational indicators, to allocate a substantial percentage of its resources to basic education for women and girls, to provide technical assistance to developing countries to strengthen the capacity to monitor progress in closing the gap between women and men in education, training and research, and to conduct an international campaign promoting the right of women and girls to education. The first two objectives had been incorporated into the UNESCO programme devoted to science, while the third had been taken up by a newly created coordinating unit on women, gender and equality.

41. As for the fourth objective — the international campaign to promote the right of women and girls to education — preparations were already under way for UNESCO to launch such a campaign in 1998 as one of the activities commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. UNESCO was also organizing a major world conference on higher education, to be held in 1998, focusing particularly on the education of women, and a world conference on science in 1999, which would accentuate the need to place science and technology at the service of women, especially in rural areas, and to continue projects on women's use and management of water and solar energy.

42. Intersectoral cooperation had progressed through the development of a UNESCO website on the Internet — Priority Women, which would be particularly useful for strengthening cooperation between UNESCO and national commissions, other United Nations agencies, international non-governmental organizations and other partners. Such cooperation included the preparation of programmes to improve the condition of women. One in particular, dealing with the education of women and girls in rural African communities, had been submitted to the Norwegian Government in May 1997.

The meeting rose at 11.40 a.m.